

REMARKS

This paper is responsive to the Final Office Action dated February 22, 2010. No claims have been amended. For at least the following reasons, the pending claims should be allowable.

As described in detail below, the Applicant submits that neither Hickey nor Lu, alone or in combination, teaches or suggests one approver notifying another approver of the changed status of an electronic message, where each approver maintains an independent copy of the electronic message. The Examiner indicates that Lu fails to teach this notifying limitation, and the Applicant argues that Hickey also fails to teach such notification at least because Hickey provides no status indicators associated with independent copies of an electronic message as claimed.

In the “Response to Arguments” regarding the rejection of claims 2, 3, 8, 18, 23-25 and 26 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a), the Examiner relies on Hickey for teaching, “. . . *notifying the at least one other approver of a changed status for the electronic message wherein the notifying includes providing to the at least one other approver an indicator to be associated with the other approver’s copy of the electronic message . . .*” Hickey describes status indicators (e.g., status indicators 57yxz described in paragraph [0043]), but those status indicators are not associated with another approver’s copy of the electronic message as the rejected claims require. Lu does not supply that which is missing from Hickey, because although Lu describes that an electronic message may be directed to one or more supervisory recipients, Lu fails to teach or suggest the notification limitation of the rejected claims. The Examiner notes this deficiency on page 8 of the pending Office Action.

The amendments included in the Response dated October 21, 2009 add the requirement that (i) the approvers maintain independent copies of the message and (ii) actions taken by one approver with respect to that approver’s copy of the message are conveyed to the other approver by associating an indicator with the other approver’s copy of the message.

As the Examiner points out, Hickey describes an automated directing of electronic communications to a selected mailbox other than the default inbox of the group electronic mailbox. As described in paragraph [0040] of Hickey, each member of a group can specify a match criteria to

define how an electronic communication is handled. Sending the communication to a specific mailbox is just one of several examples Hickey describes. The match criteria allows users to sort and otherwise dispose of incoming communications.

A key point here is that Hickey describes electronic communications as unique entities, without reliance on copies. Hickey describes routing and/or operating on incoming electronic communications, and associating status information with the communication based on those actions. Hickey, however, does not teach or suggest directing independent copies of a particular communication to different users' mailboxes. Doing so would go against the teachings of Hickey because Hickey relies on group mailboxes when two or more users need to view the same communication. Hickey repeatedly describes the benefits of such shared communication, and the drawbacks of independent copies of communications in separate mailboxes. For example:

"A group electronic mail (e-mail) mailbox is provided to enable multiple users to work collaboratively and simultaneously with one or more electronic communications received in the group e-mail mailbox. The group e-mail mailbox provides tools that allow members of a group to access and manipulate the received electronic communications." (Abstract).

"The copies of the e-mail message in each member's box exist independently and are not linked. Electronic mailboxes are configured for use by only one user at a time. Thus, it is difficult for members of the group to coordinate their actions. For example, it can be difficult to establish whether any member of the group has responded to a particular received electronic communication without individually contacting each member of the group. It can also be difficult to obtain other status information such as how, when, and by whom in the group the communication is being processed. Information that should be made available in a timely manner to each group member may not be shared at all or at least not simultaneously." (paragraph [0005]).

"Consequently, it can be difficult for different members of a group to work collaboratively without frequent telephonic or electronic communications across the whole group. Moreover, the lack of simultaneous sharing of all the electronic communications intended for use by the whole group can severely impair an efficient and coordinated functioning of a group." (paragraph [0008]).

"In the present invention, a system and method is provided for multiple users to concurrently share one or more electronic communications. The electronic communications reside in electronic mailbox that is accessible by members of the group. When an authorized member of the group takes an action with regard to the electronic communication, other members of the group can see what has been done." (paragraph [0016]).

“Once the electronic communication is stored in the group electronic mailbox, any member of the group can view the stored electronic communication and any member of the group having an appropriate permission attribute can determine an appropriate response or an action responsive to the electronic communication. For example, an individual member of the group can select actions from a set of response tools for performing desired functions.” (paragraph [0020]).

This theme is repeated throughout Hickey. The group mailboxes of Hickey remove the motivation for duplicating incoming messages. Hickey clearly teaches away from creating independent copies of electronic communications as required by the rejected claims.

Figure 7 of Hickey further demonstrates the above-described reliance on a group mailbox when an e-mail is directed to multiple users, rather than generating copies of the e-mail. Reference numbers 236, 244, 246, 249 and 240 describe a path associated with an e-mail destined for multiple users. When a comparison (reference 236) determines a match to a criteria template, notification recipients are determined (reference 244) and the corresponding recipients are notified (references 246 and 248). The associated e-mail is then delivered to a group mailbox (reference 240 through tab A). The notified members of the group can then access the e-mail through the group mailbox, and perform various acts on the e-mail (reference 265).

The Examiner further cites the following text from Hickey regarding the “notification” claim limitation in the rejected claims:

From Hickey paragraph [0015]: “It is still a further aspect of the invention to provide an automatic method for updating and notifying members or users of a group of any changes in status information of received electronic communications, the received electronic communications are being continually operated on by multiple members or users of the group to cause changes in their statuses.”

From Hickey paragraph [0043]: “In response to acts by one member of group 22A1 that cause a status change, a signal is transmitted to update the associated status indicator 57A1 for any other group member viewing the status indicator 57A11.”

The Applicant notes that neither of these descriptions satisfy the requirement of “... wherein the notifying includes providing to the at least one other approver an indicator to be associated with the other approver’s copy of the electronic message . . .” (emphasis added). The status changes

referred to in these paragraphs concern modifications of one particular received message, and do not relate a change made to one approver's copy of an electronic message to another approver's copy of the same message. In other words, Hickey teaches that when any one of several users modifies a received electronic communication, the status of that communication is updated so that other users viewing the communication will be notified of the modification.

The messages of Hickey are unique – no copies exist that need to be coordinated. This concept is described throughout Hickey. Paragraph [0043] describes a “. . . status indicator 57yxz for each of the one or more electronic communications 53yx . . .” (emphasis added). The ‘z’ index of the status indicator represents particular types of modification status, such as ‘new’, ‘read’, ‘answered’, etc., as shown in Hickey Figure 6. This figure clearly illustrates that each status indicator 57yxz corresponds to one and only one message, which all users in a particular group can view. When one user modifies an electronic communication, the status indicator changes so that other users are notified of the change when the other users view the electronic communication. For example, the status indicator of the first communication in Figure 6 changes from ‘New’ to ‘Read’ when any of the users reads that communication. Subsequent users are notified of this status change when they view the communication along with its associated status indicator.

Finally, on page 10 of the Office Action, the Examiner states, “The reasons why Hickey came up with this system and method is stated in para. [0007], ‘some group members may be deprived of information regarding the received e-mail message and the actions taken by the other group members in connection with the message. In addition, there is limited control on the flow, distribution and processing of the information intended to be shared among the members of group 22.’ ”

In the cited text, Hickey describes disadvantages associated with prior art e-mail systems that create copies of an incoming e-mail in separate mailboxes (i.e., “An e-mail 21 addressed to group 22 is received in the respective e-mail mailbox 20₁, 20₂ and 20₃ for the users U₁, U₂, and U₃” paragraph [0007]).

Hickey's solution to the disadvantage cited by the Examiner above is to create group mailboxes rather than instantiate copies of the e-mail in separate mailboxes. The Applicant's claims, on the other hand, recite independent copies of the electronic message and relates those copies to one another through an indicator. Hickey is clearly teaching away from the Applicant's claimed subject matter.

For the foregoing reasons, independent claims 18 and 26 should be allowable. Dependent claims 2, 3, 8, 19-25 and 27-30 should also be allowable as depending from allowable base claims.

In view of the above remarks, the Applicant believes the pending application is in condition for allowance.

Applicant believes no fee is due with this response. However, if a fee is due, please charge our Deposit Account No. 08-0219, under Order No. 0113715.00134US1 from which the undersigned is authorized to draw.

Respectfully submitted,

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